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LEVEL news

Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Water Levels

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Water Levels for the Great Lakes and Montreal Harbour

... a monthly bulletin from Canadian Hydrographic Service

About the monthly Water Level bulletin

February Precipitation Over the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term February average:

Great Lakes Basin	142%
Lake Erie (including Lake St. Clair)	178%
Lake Superior	51%
Lakes Michigan-Huron	184%
Lake Ontario	113%

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Concerns Continue to Escalate

High Water Level Situation Worsens on Middle Lakes

Water levels on Lakes Huron, St. Clair and Erie increased rapidly during February, and concerns that flooding and storm damage will be experienced this spring and summer increased with the levels. It was another month with above average amounts of precipitation over the basins of these lakes, with heavy rainfall on the 20th-21st and again on the 26th-27th aggravating the situation.

February is often a month during which levels of the middle lakes are static, but this year the levels of Lakes Huron, St. Clair and Erie increased by 7, 18, and 22 cm, respectively, from the beginning to the end of the month. Most of this increase occurred in the last few days of February, so it is not fully reflected in the monthly average levels.

The heavy rainfall events that affected much of the Great Lakes basin passed to the south of Lake Superior's basin. It was a dry month over Superior's basin, and temperatures below freezing for most of the month limited snowmelt in that area. As a result, the lake's level declined by an average amount during the month.

Water levels on most of the lakes (except Lake Ontario) during February were similar to those of February 1973 and February 1985. Severe storm and flooding damages were experienced along portions of the shoreline in the springs of both those years, and there is a strong possibility that similar events could occur again this year.

Ice cover on the lakes and shorefast ice along the shoreline help to reduce the risk of storm damage during the winter and spring. A relatively late freezeup on Lake Erie and mild weather in late February has resulted in open water over most of the western half of Lake Erie by the end of February. It is possible that the protection afforded by ice cover will be lost relatively early this spring over much of Lake Erie.

If above average amounts of rainfall and runoff should continue over the next several months, water levels on Lakes Superior, Huron, St. Clair and Erie could rise to within 10 cm of the record highs of 1986 by late spring.

Note: These figures are preliminary.

February Outflows From the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term February average:

Lake Superior	125%
Lake Erie	n/a%
Lake Huron	n/a%
Lake Ontario	131%

Note: These figures are preliminary.

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Summary information for "LEVEL*news*"

Water Level Conditions Improve Slightly on Lake Ontario

Record high outflows from Lake Ontario during February slowed down the increase in levels of the lake. Formation of a stable ice cover on the St. Lawrence River by the end of January permitted the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control to steadily increase outflows throughout the month.

The high outflows during February helped to offset above average water supplies to the lake caused by high inflows from Lake Erie and high local runoff, with the result that Lake Ontario's level increased by an average amount during the month.

Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River Information

The International St. Lawrence River Board of Control has implemented a toll free telephone service that provides brief information on water levels for select locations on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. As well, information is provided on the Lake Ontario outflow and some other current situations. This information is updated at least once a week and is available in both official languages.

The toll free number for English is 1-800-215-8794 and for French is 1-800-215-9173.

Ice Data on WWW

Last year we provided a URL address at which ice cover data for the Great Lakes was available from the National Weather Service. That address is no longer functional, but similar ice cover data is available at: http://www.natice.noaa.gov/. This is a site operated by the National Ice Center of the United States government.

Outflow Data

At the suggestion of a reader, data on lake outflows for the past month have been added to Level News. Initially, data for Lakes Superior and Ontario have been included, since they are regulated and the data are readily available. We hope to include data for the other lakes in the coming months.

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